

Ellen Heitmann

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EDUCATION

2021 - 2025

DigiPen Institute of Technology

Bachelor of Arts in Game Design, Minor in Psychology

GPA: 3.63; Cum Laude

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Game Studies; Disability Studies; Neuroqueer Theory; Affect Theory; Cultural Studies; Critical Theory; Gender and Sexuality Studies; Feminist Theory; Communications

EMPLOYMENT (academic)

Spring 2025

Teaching Assistant; Identities at Play

DigiPen Institute of Technology

- Mentored 22 students on topics of identity, culture, and structural inequality within video games, covering in-game content, industry, fandom, and academia.
- Provided constructive feedback for 30+ game studies research papers and human-centered design pitches.
- Facilitated hybrid class periods.

Fall 2023; Fall 2024

Teaching Assistant; Narrative Design

DigiPen Institute of Technology

- Mentored 149 students on game narrative design methods across two courses.
- Graded and provided actionable feedback for 100+ video game writing and prototyping assignments.
- Organized weekly workshops and created lecture material on game analysis methods to coach students entering GDC's narrative review competition, 4 of whom won.

AWARDS AND HONORS

2023

Platinum Award

Game Narrative Review Competition

Game Developers Conference

- Authored a 13-page paper critically analyzing the narrative of *Xenoblade Chronicles*.
- Gave a presentation at GDC 2023.

Spring 2025	Dean's List ; DigiPen Institute of Technology
Fall 2024	Dean's List ; DigiPen Institute of Technology
Spring 2024	Dean's List ; DigiPen Institute of Technology
Spring 2023	Dean's List ; DigiPen Institute of Technology
Spring 2022	Dean's List ; DigiPen Institute of Technology

PROJECTS

Fall 2024 - Present	<p>Public Scholarship Content Creation</p> <p><i>YouTube</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Researched, scripted, recorded, and edited 3 rigorous analysis video essays on neurodivergent-coded video game characters, experimenting with principles from affect theory and communications to inform and affirm neurodiverse audiences. - Integrated 30+ publications and books across disability studies, media studies, and psychology. - Achieved donations, an 11% like rate, and 100+ comments per video.
Spring 2025	<p>Apocalypse Resort</p> <p>Research Assistant; User Experience Designer</p> <p>Research Creation Project</p> <p><i>DigiPen Institute of Technology</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborated with Professor Christopher Hawk to design a video game for use in psychology experiments examining prosocial and aggressive behavioral outcomes. - Conducted research on 20+ commercial video games to ascertain genre trends. - Wrote accessible game design documentation to facilitate communications among interdisciplinary team members.
Spring 2024 - Spring 2025	<p>Shadow's Grove</p> <p>Creative Director; Narrative Designer</p> <p>3D Narrative Adventure Game; Published on Steam</p> <p><i>DigiPen Institute of Technology</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Led a team of 27 designers, artists, programmers, and musicians, hosting regular meetings across departments to communicate ideas, solicit feedback, and uphold cohesion. - Wrote game design documents, scripted 50+ dialogue lines, hosted 30+ playtests, created 2 cinematics, and edited trailers.

- Conducted cultural research, providing inspiration and references for narrative, character design, and architecture.
- Fall 2022 - Fall 2023 **Strike Back**
User Interface Designer; Technical Designer; Associate Producer
2D Fighting Game; Published on Steam
DigiPen Institute of Technology
- Designed game user interface, including 7 menus and a heads-up display in Figma.
 - Created documentation detailing inspirations, references, and design intent.
 - Implemented user interface into a playable prototype in Unity using C# coding.
 - Conducted 30+ playtests and analyzed findings.

EMPLOYMENT (non-academic)

- Fall 2025 - Present **Lead Instructor**
Snapology
- Instructed groups of up to 20 students on STEM concepts, including engineering, robotics, and architecture.
- Summer 2025 - Present **Learning Facilitator**
Steamoji
- Guided and encouraged students tackling complex STEAM projects across digital arts, physical computing, fabrication, engineering, and robotics.
 - Hosted 30+ orientation trials to recruit new students and improve outreach.
- Fall 2023 - Spring 2023 **Web Designer; User Researcher**
Global Callcenter Solutions
- Conducted research on 50+ competitors and synthesized findings to design a more modern-facing company website.
 - Created and implemented introductory videos and animations in Adobe After Effects.